Manuel Ramón Rosa Santiago
Prof. Judith Gibbs
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Characters' creation in At Swim-Two-Birds

Within the development of the plot of O'Brien's book, there is a series of descriptive paragraphs used to characterize the participants of the action. In these parts, a detailed description of every character and scene is made, not only in a physical manner but in a psychologic manner too. So, there is a continuous presence of perception and thinking in the whole book. These descriptions give a complete image of the character and develop from a simple physical defect until the sensation is felt in a specific moment.

Physical references are always made to the characters' defects. The uncle's image is characterized by the student with features which are portrayed in cartoons such as the red color of his cheeks, his monkey-like figure, the form of his belly, his spherical eyes, etc. Furriskey and McCool and the other characters imagined by the student are treated in the same way: "Three fifties of fosterlings could engage with handball against the wideness of his backside, which was large enough to halt the march of men through a mountain pass." (page 9, lines 29 to 32). The author pays all his attention in the description of every grotesque feature present in his characters.

The gestures have a place in these descriptions too; that is, to ridicule the simplicity of the characters. This is shown indirectly, in a roundabout way. For example, it is evident during the scene when the uncle is eating a piece of bread with rasher " . . . in a token of continued interrogation. " (page 10, lines 10 to 11). There is nothing that can escape from the observer's point of view. The apparition of this crude realism describes a grotesque reality through caricaturization and hyperbole. All the defects and oddnesses are personified in the participants. The result is the creation of the ridiculous character, the Spanish *esperpento*.

In relation to the psychical level, there are three

different aspects to analyze: the attitudes, the customs, and the thoughts. The first two features are usually expressed through the description of physical acts such as answers, exclamations, and every kind of articulations.

The treatment of the attitudes is made following a temporal and circumstancial development. For example, the opinion of the protagonist about his uncle suffers a complete change. In the beginning, he defines his uncle as " . . . concerned-that-he-should-be-well-thought-of. " (page 30, line 11), while at the conclusion he defines him as " . . . well-intentioned. " (page 215, line 16). It is a change from a negative attitude to a positive one. As well, there is a change in Orlick's smile in a few instances (page 186). The essence of this description is not the nature of the different smiles. What the author wants to express is the change of Orlick's state of mind, from surprise to relaxation.

The ways of being are treated in a similar manner. They are frequently gestures or articulations made in a particular moment and answer a determined circumstance. The silence is described too (page 92, line 35). It has some connotations only present in the mind of the protagonist which must be written. It expresses indifference, an aspect that can not be known if the author omits this note.

The characters' customs denote the main features of their personality. The student and Kelly's walk is an example of the two one's vanal purposes. Another example is the student's curriculum vitae. This is a summary of things that only can be related to an apathetic person, without too many worries. He wastes most of the day in leisure and relaxation while his study time is only half an hour.

In respect to the inner behaviour of the participants, the author makes some references of their thoughts and their internal monologues (for example, the revelation made by O'Brien about the student's mistakes after this one's examination of his own book). It is not necessary to specify these things because they only happen in the character's mind, but the author writes the thoughts of every character even though they are not articulated. The same applies to the crazy thoughts emerging in the mind of the student after

drinking beer for the first time:

> Nature of interrogation: Who are my future cronies, where our mad carousals? What neat repast shall feast as light and choice of Attic taste with wine whence we may rise to hear the lute well touched or artful voice warble immortal notes or Tuscan air? What mad pursuit? What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy? (page 22, lines 21 to 25).

This set of rhetorical questions inserted in the text is not only the expression of a whole thought; it is the effect of the alcohol. Besides this, eloquence and fantasy are two of the dominant elements which are indispensable to create a book like one the student is writing and alcohol has something to do in this one's great imaginative capacity.

All these factors help O'Brien to write a novel in which description is the basis of every character. Through a strict detailing of the physical features he creates the series of pretend and real characters. Irony and hyperbole are the main elements of these descriptions together with a touch of complexity. As a result, a kind of grotesque character appears. But he wants his characters to have life and displays their innermost thoughts. The finality is to create imagery. In this way, by means of external and internal description, he builds a true image of the characters in the mind of the reader, as though the story was real. Through these descriptive paragraphs, O'Brien gives existence to his characters.

Works cited

O'Brien, Flann. At Swim-Two-Birds. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1.986